



THE ETRUSCAN FLUTES - AMONG MYTHS, IMAGINARY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

from Arcadia to Picasso (Soundcenter Productions, 2003)

I FLAUTI ETRUSCHI -

Tra Mito, Immaginario e Archeologia

by Walter Maioli

with the participation of Luce Maioli and Nathalie van Ravenstein

Music Compact Disc with 12 compositions + 24 page research booklet

Reviewed by Stephan Steingraber

ETRUSCAN MUSIC AND MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN ETRUSCAN ART

Particularly in recent years studies on Etruscan music and musical instruments became popular again among scholars in different fields. From September 18th to 20th in 2009 Emiliano Li Castro together with the administration of the city of Tarquinia, the Soprintendenza Archeologica dell'Etruria meridionale and G. Bagnasco Gianni of the University of Milan organized in the town hall and the church of San Giacomo in Tarquinia a congress/convegno on "La Musica in Etruria" with contributions of 20 scholars from different nations, among them archaeologists, etruscologists, historians, musicologists, musicians and instrument-makers. The papers of this unique congress – partly theoretical and partly practical in character – were divided into different sections such as introduction, organology, iconography, and literary and epigraphic sources and they will be published in 2010. Some demonstrations of reconstructed Etruscan instruments, a concert, a small exhibition in the Archaeological Museum of Tarquinia on "Strumenti musicali nell'Etruria meridionale" and a thematic visit in the painted tombs of the Monterozzi Necropolis completed this exciting event.

It is not easy to approach and to attempt to reconstruct ancient and particularly Etruscan music. Methodologically, one must follow three main pathways:

1. the manifold representations of musicians and musical instruments on different kinds of Etruscan monuments and objects
2. the original finds of Etruscan instruments in tombs, sanctuaries and shipwrecks
3. the reconstruction of the ancient instruments and the experimental use of them

Many ancient – mainly Greek and Roman - literary sources confirm the common use and great importance of musical instruments in Etruscan life and culture. We know many representations of musical scenes and instruments in Etruscan art: in tomb painting; Etruscan and Faliscan vase painting mostly in black figure and red figure technique, images on sarcophagi, stelai (especially from Fiesole and Felsina), urns (mainly from Volterra, Chiusi and Perugia) and *cippi* (mainly from Chiusi) in stone, reliefs on architectural terracotta friezes (particularly from Acquarossa), mirrors, reliefs, statuettes (partly belonging to candelabra or *thymiateria*), *situlae* from the Padana area in bronze, and a *situla* in silver “di Plikasna” (from Chiusi). But the colorful Etruscan paintings undoubtedly offer the most vivacious and instructive representations.

In the Etruscan tomb paintings of Tarquinia, Chiusi and Orvieto - dating from the second half of the 6th to the second half of the 4th century BCE - we find representations of the following musicians:

Player of Barbitos: in 5 tombs
 Player of Kithara: in 21 tombs
 Player of Lyra: in 12 tombs
 Player of Flute/Aulos: in 52 tombs
 Player of Cornu and Lituus-trumpet: in 9 tombs
 Dancer with krotale/castanets : in 11 tombs

According to these statistics the great popularity of the *aulos* is clearly emerging and this fact is confirmed by Aristotle and later authors too !

Chronologically, most representations of musicians and instruments in Etruscan art date from the 6th to the 2nd century B.C. which means from the Archaic to the Hellenistic period. From the Orientalizing period of the 7th century we know many fewer representations (but there are several original instruments).

Concerning the iconographic contexts we find mythological scenes (such as Cacus who plays the lyre on a mirror), banquet scenes (as in the Tombe della Caccia e Pesca, delle Bighe, del Triclinio, della Nave, Querciola I, della Pulcella, dei Demoni Azzurri and degli Scudi in Tarquinia; and in the Tomba del Colle Casuccini in Chiusi and in the Tombe Golini I and II in Orvieto), *komos* scenes (as in the Tombe delle Iscrizioni, dei Baccanti, Cardarelli, della Caccia e Pesca, dei Leopardi and 5591 in Tarquinia), dance scenes – partly with armed dancers (as in the Tombe delle Leonesse, del Citaredo, delle Bighe, del Triclinio, del Letto funebre, del Gallo, 3713 and 5513 in Tarquinia and in the Tombe del Colle Casuccini and della Scimmia in Chiusi), meeting and farewell scenes (as in the Tomba del Barone in Tarquinia), scenes with athletic competitions (as in the Tomba del Guerriero in Tarquinia, the Tombe di Poggio al Moro, del Colle Casuccini and della

Scimmia in Chiusi), acrobatic and spectacle scenes (as in the Tomba dei Giocolieri in Tarquinia and the Tomba della Scimmia in Chiusi), funeral ceremonies (as in the Tombe della Pulcella and del Morto in Tarquinia), processions with magistrates (as in the Tombe degli Scudi and Bruschi in Tarquinia and the Tombe Golini II and Hescanas in Orvieto), processions/parades (as in the Tombe dei Leopardi and dei Demoni Azzurri in Tarquinia), the journey to the underworld (as in the Tomba Golini I in Orvieto) and instruments hanging from the wall (as in the Tomba Giglioli in Tarquinia and the Tomba dei Rilievi in Cerveteri).

But our knowledge of Etruscan instruments is not based only on representations in art but also on mostly fragmentary originals discovered as burial gifts in the tombs or as votive gifts in sanctuaries or in ship wrecks located underwater. Especially in recent years the number of originals has increased remarkably. Unfortunately but understandably most wooden parts of instruments have disappeared. We know *plektra* and “bridges”/*ponticelli* in ivory and bone mostly from the Hellenistic period but also from the end of the 7th century BCE (Vulci). A *cornu/bucina* or horn in bronze and another one in ivory have been found in the aristocratic Tumulo dei Carri in Populonia (middle of the 7th century). A bronze *cornu* of the former Castellani Collection is now kept in the Archaeological Museum of Karlsruhe in Germany. A very early (first quarter of the 7th century) *lituus*-trumpet in bronze was offered as a votive gift in the monumental “complesso sacro-istituzionale” in Tarquinia. Flutes (in wood !) were part of the cargo in the shipwreck of Campese near the Island of Giglio dating from the beginning of the 6th century. Another flute in bone came from the territory of Chianciano in southern Tuscany. We can expect other exciting discoveries in the future too!

According to Bruno Del Papa and other scholars in the field of “Archeomusicologia” we can distinguish the following organologic groups of musical instruments in Etruria:

1. Idiofoni:
Krotala
2. Membranofoni:
Tympanon
3. Cordofoni:
a) Lyra and Barbitos
b) Kithara and Kithara-Lyra
4. Aerofoni:
a) Aulos
b) Transverse flute
c) Syrinx/Pan flute
d) Cornu potorio, Cornu/Bucina (used during processions and funerals) and Lituus-trumpet (used for signals in war). As we know from the literary sources a trumpet sound in the sky according to the haruspices announced the end of a “*saeculum*” or length of time roughly equal to the potential lifetime of a person or generation.

Generally music and musical instruments in ancient Greece are better known and have been better studied than those of Etruria. We possess much more information from the literary sources. Without a doubt Greek instruments had a strong and lasting influence on Etruscan instruments from at least the 6th century. Thousands of Attic vases both in black and in red figure technique were exported to Etruria and many of them show representations of music scenes and instruments in numerous iconographic contexts. Most probably original Greek instruments reached Etruria too. But this does not mean Etruscan music was a simple imitation of Greek music.

Concerning Southern Italy/Magna Graecia such scenes and instruments are mainly represented on red figure vases from Apulia, Campania and Lucania (late 5th to late 4th century BCE). But also the tomb paintings of these areas give us useful information. We know only very few representations in Apulian and Campanian tombs (such as a tomb in Capua with female dancers with a *krotale* or cymbal and an *aulos* or flute). There are no music scenes known in Samnite tomb paintings. There are about 20 more examples in the 4th century Lucanian tomb paintings of Paestum. Unlike Etruria the only represented instrument is the *aulos* – used both by male and female flautists and it appears mostly in *prothesis* scenes in female tombs (such as the Tombe Andriuolo 47 and 51), in boxing scenes (as in the Tombe Andriuolo 104 and 1/1971) and duel scenes (as in the Tombe Andriuolo 58 and Gaudo 1/1972) but in a few cases it appears in scenes with a *Phlyax* (Tomba Andriuolo 53), a Nike on a quadriga (Tomba Andriuolo 84) and a funeral procession (Tomba Andriuolo 114). Among the sculptures from Southern Italy the monumental terracotta group of “Orpheus” playing the lyre between two Sirens in the Getty Villa in Malibu is particularly impressive. Fragments of flutes and *lyrai* (of tortoise shell) dating from the 6th to the 4th century have been found mainly in necropoleis and tombs of Greeks in Magna Graecia, showing the pervasive Greek influence in this area. Concerning the Hellenistic period (3rd – 2nd century) fragments of flutes in bone occur among the rich burial gifts of tombs in Daunia (Ipogeo della Medusa and Tomba delle Anfore in Arpi, other tombs in Ascoli Satriano and Canosa) and Taras/Taranto too.

Having introduced the subject and something of its background, one can then turn to Walter Maioli and his unique group “Synaulia” to whom we owe a lot of publications, reconstructions of ancient musical instruments, experimental “Greek”, “Etruscan” and “Roman” music and last but not least the CD “The Etruscan Flutes – Among Myths, Imaginary and Archaeology, from Arcadia to Picasso” which includes 12 different music pieces with the participation of Walter Maioli, his daughter Luce Maioli and Nathalie van Ravenstein who tragically deceased last year. As instruments the group uses the *syrix*/pan flute, transverse flutes, double flutes (*fistulae*) and reed instruments (*tibiae* and *plagiaulos*). The different types of flutes are accompanied and played in combination with percussion instruments such as *crotala*, *tintinnabulum*, *tympanum*, *lyra* and *cithara*. But Maioli also uses sounds of nature found in Etruscan locations such as Volterra and Populonia and their surroundings: the forest, the springs, the torrents, the sea ... The result is amazing – of course a bit exotic for those people used to hearing only the sounds of classical music.

For about three decades Walter Maioli has researched ancient Mediterranean and

Etruscan music and especially Etruscan flutes. Through the reconstruction of musical instruments according to the best possible results from archaeology, his research could help not only archaeologists and musicians, but a wider public too, to understand the different types of musical instruments represented in ancient iconography and described in the ancient texts – instruments which entered into our mythical imagination, such as the Etruscan double flute which is represented in all epochs up to Picasso and beyond. Maioli's research also reveals less considered aspects of ancient instruments such as the deep symbolic and psycho-acoustic value of the sounds that they produce.

Together with his daughter Luce Maioli and Nathalie van Ravenstein, the “paleoorganologist”, experimental archaeologist, composer and flautist Maioli founded the group SYNAULIA and the association IL CENTRO DEL SUONO. Living and working mainly in the areas of Volterra (Toscana), Barbarano Romano (Viterbese) and Naples they organized beautiful concerts and performances featuring costumes and dance, using the reconstructed ancient instruments often in the open air, in the middle of Etruscan nature and necropoleis and followed by some “*libatio*” with Etruscan wine. They also held workshops and exhibitions, published books and CDs and created sound and music for theater, video and films, even including the movie *Gladiator*. The group is well known now also in other countries and especially in Germany. Maioli and his group SYNAULIA succeeded to revive the sounds of Etruscan instruments and nature in a very special way based not only on romantic fantasy but on solid interdisciplinary research!

The CD “The Etruscan Flutes ...” is accompanied by a small and well illustrated booklet with descriptions of the 12 music pieces and their characteristic titles such as “Reunion with the Soul” or “Pan and Echo” and the instruments used are listed. If one is spurred on by this to pursue the subject further, a basic bibliography is appended below.

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